

Proposal Abstract – Vanisko Ranch Conservation Easement

Applicant: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Project Title: Vanisko Ranch Conservation Easement

Project Description and Benefits to Restoration:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks seeks \$5.655 million dollars of funding from the Upper Clark Fork River Basin Restoration Fund to pay for placement of a conservation easement on 7,140 acres of the Vanisko Ranch and to purchase fee title of two forest inholdings, totaling 186.17 acres, located near Orofino and Racetrack Creeks. The perpetual conservation of this large ranch within the watershed, and purchase of the private inholdings, will serve to replace and rehabilitate terrestrial and aquatic resources and services lost as a result of the operations of ARCO and its predecessors.

Under this proposal Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks will hold and monitor the conservation easement in perpetuity. Conservation easement terms will include a prohibition on subdivision, guidelines for range and forest management, permanent public hunting access, and other recreational access to the property. A Project Development Grant (PDG) reviewed by the Restoration and Remediation Advisory Council, and approved by the Trustee Restoration Council on August 16, 2007, funded a baseline inventory, appraisal of the ranch, and initial negotiations with the Berg family (the Vanisko Ranch owners). Extensive preliminary work has been completed; remaining tasks include approval by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission, final negotiations with the Berg's, completion of an Environmental Assessment (EA), public review, approval by the Council, Trustees and Governor, and closing. With funding and support from the Natural Resource Damage Program (NRDP) all of these tasks can be accomplished by January 2009. Substantial public support exists for the proposal as is demonstrated by letters of support from representatives of nine organizations.

The main Vanisko Ranch is a large contiguous property, which includes portions of several drainages (Peterson, Orofino, and Caribou) near the headwaters of the Clark Fork, multiple springs, native bunchgrass communities, aspen stands, and forest communities dominated by Douglas fir. In total, 15 miles of streams and riparian areas exist on the property, plus almost a mile of Racetrack Creek on the Racetrack inholding. Native habitat types on the ranch are representative of their historic composition with grasslands transitioning into dry forest communities as elevation climbs from 5050 feet to 7480 feet.

The Vanisko Ranch borders public lands on three sides and possesses exceptional wildlife habitat. The diversity of habitats on the ranch is reflected by the diversity of species that are present. Few ranches in western Montana provide habitat for antelope, mule deer, white-tailed deer, elk, and moose; the Vanisko Ranch supports these 5 ungulate species, a genetically pure strain of west slope cutthroat trout, 17 carnivores, 31 other mammals, 174 birds, 3 amphibians, 5 reptiles, and 4 other fish species. Conservation of the Vanisko Ranch will provide lasting benefits to the Upper Clark Fork River Basin. Natural Resource Damage Program funding for the Vanisko Ranch Conservation Easement is consistent with the UCFRB Restoration Plan Procedures & Criteria and will allow Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to deliver a cornerstone conservation project at the head of the Upper Clark Fork River Basin.

2008 Application		BUDGET SUMMARY FORM			
EXPENSE CATEGORY	UCFRB RESTORATION FUND	MATCHING FUNDS			TOTAL
		Cash	In-Kind	Subtotal	
1 SALARIES AND WAGES	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$10,000.00	10,000.00	\$10,000.00
2 FRINGE BENEFITS	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,800.00	\$1,800.00	\$1,800.00
3 CONTRACTED SERVICES	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$13,500	\$13,500.00	\$13,500.00
4 SUPPLIES AND MATERIALS	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$250.00	\$250.00	\$250.00
5 COMMUNICATIONS	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$250.00	\$250.00	\$250.00
6 TRAVEL	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,231.00	\$1,231.00	\$1,231.00
7 RENT AND UTILITIES	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
8 EQUIPMENT	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
9 MISCELLANEOUS	\$5,655,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$5,655,000.00
TOTAL	\$5,655,000.00	\$0.00	\$27031.00	\$27031.00	\$5,682,031.00